

Chapter 2 Pakistan in Potential Crisis: religion, Ethnic Groups and the Military

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Chapter 2

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2.1 *Islamic Fundamentalism and Terrorism*

The term “Islamic fundamentalism” is now in wide usage. This report does not go into discussion whether the term is appropriate or not, but the author would like to point out in this chapter to start with that “Islamic fundamentalism” is not synonymous with “terrorism.”

“Islamic fundamentalism” means following the principles of Islam. But, if someone comes forward to hinder the observance of Islamic principles, Muslims might try to remove the hindrance even by force. In that kind of situation, “Islamic fundamentalism” may invoke a “holy war,” and possibly terrorism.

In April 1978, the aforementioned “Saur Revolution” or the socialist coup occurred in Afghanistan. In the eyes of the Afghan people, the incident was a “communist revolution that denies religion.” The repulsion grew into an anti-communism movement that did not mind terrorism and further developed into a civil war (a holy war).

In 1979, Soviet troops invaded and occupied Afghanistan, giving rise to the war between the Soviet-Afghan coalition forces and anti-communist forces. There was an Arab in the anti-communist camp. That was Osama bin Ladin⁶, whom the United States has been trying to capture or kill as an international terrorist. He left Afghanistan once, but then returned in 1996 to join the Taliban. The United States, which had been backing the Taliban for the purpose of solidifying its net encircling Iran, turned decidedly hostile to them from this time on.⁷

Osama bin Ladin is a Saudi billionaire in exile. Looking at his background, it is not easily possible to immediately accept a common view that “Islamic fundamentalism is born out of the gap between the rich and the poor. The author feels that differences in religious thought are more important than the rich-poor disparity as the foundation of Islamic fundamentalism.

Still, it cannot perhaps be denied that

Osama bin Ladin provided massive funds⁸ to the Taliban and this got him deeply involved with them. Moreover, it is no surprise if Osama, who has an extremely strong anti-American sentiment, had a strong influence over Omar and the Taliban in general not only for their anti-American feelings but also for their ideology and terrorism as a weapon.

2.2 *Islamic Fundamentalism in Pakistan*

In Pakistan, which gained independence in 1947, it has been a matter of controversy since immediately after independence up until today whether Pakistan should be an Islamic divine state or a Muslim state with secularism.

The controversy became even more intense after the military regime of the late General Muhammad Zia ul Haq put forth “Islamization” of Pakistan, a Muslim state. The “Islamization” policy was gradually implemented, centering on the Islamic criminal code, the poor tax, and the no-interest banking system. These measures gave many foreign observers an impression that Pakistan was on the path to an Islamic divine state. In reality, however, the “Islamization” policy was a means to establish legitimacy for the military regime that ruled the country with force. Furthermore, Gen. Zia found a support base for his military regime in Islamic fundamentalist organizations in order to suppress movements for the country’s democratization.

In the process of “Islamization,” Gen. Zia gave particular importance to the Jama ‘at-e-Islami (JI), the most well-organized among Islamic fundamentalist organizations in Pakistan. JI mainly consists of Saudi Arabia’s Sunni Wahabi⁹ followers. Under Zia’s military regime JI rapidly gained influence within the military, and many young people who joined the military service in the 1980s became JI activists. Because of this, it is said, the present ranks of young commissioned or general officers have strong consciousness as “Islamic soldiers.” JI was established in India in 1941, and moved its headquarters to Pakistan six years later when India and Pakistan became independent as two separate

states. JI has strongholds of its activities in such cities as Lahore and Karachi.

It is essential to mention on the Jamiat ul Ulema-e-Islami (JUI) as another important Islamic fundamentalist organization in Pakistan. JUI's Islamic ideology is based on the theory of the Deobandi school which originated in India and is said to be radical.

Unlike JI, JUI has its strongholds in rural areas. Specifically, JUI has a network of mosques and madrassahs in underdeveloped regions including North West Frontier Province, Balochistan Province and southern parts of Punjab Province. JUI has high penetration within communities of the Pashtuns in the North West Frontier Province and Balochistan Province both bordering Afghanistan and Pakistan. Taliban members are mostly the young men who received religious education at JUI-operated madrassahs.

The following paragraphs touch upon the relationship between Gen. Zia's Afghanistan policy and Islamic fundamentalism within Pakistan. International developments in the Islamic world, particularly in the Middle East and West Asia, have an immediate influence on Pakistan. Of the incidents that occurred in the region in the last quarter century, the Afghan war has had the single strongest influence over Islamism in Pakistan.

When Soviet troops invaded Afghanistan in December 1979, President Gen. Zia forged a de facto military alliance with the United States. While accepting massive military and economic assistance from the United States, a Christian state, Gen. Zia appealed to the Pakistani people's religious feelings for the "protection of Islam from communism." JI and other organizations acted in concert with the military regime in drumming up Muslim sentiment (not limited to Islamic fundamentalists) across the country.

Those were the heydays of President Gen. Zia at the forefront of the "defense of Islam and the mother country." Even the United States, the Christian superpower, depended on Gen. Zia and Islamic fundamentalists, while fundamentalists in Pakistan did not spare their lives to help Afghans who took refuge in Pakistan as their "Islamic brothers."

2.3 Divided Ethnic Group and "Talibanization" of Pakistan

The Pashtuns, the biggest ethnic group in Afghanistan, account for some 38%¹⁰ of Afghanistan's total population. The Pashtun people live in both sides of the Afghan-Pakistani border. The Durand Line dividing them is the border drawn in 1893 between Afghanistan and the British Indian Empire. When the Indian Empire was partitioned to create two independent states of India and Pakistan, the region east of the Durand Line was made Pakistan's territory and residents there became "Pakistani nationals".

Generally speaking, Pakistani Pashtuns do not have a strong sense of "being Pakistani nationals." The ethnic Pashtuns living in Afghanistan and Pakistan are divided into some 60 tribes. Among them, many Pashtuns living in the Pashtun Belt region are relatives by birth or marriage and are also interdependent in commercial transactions. Therefore, the "border" to them is just something that appears on the map.

Most of the Taliban come from the ethnic Pashtun group. For this reason, the influence of the Taliban cannot be prevented from spreading to the Pashtun Belt region along the NorthWestern Frontier Province and the Balochistan Province. Also, not a few Pashtuns live in areas other than the Pashtun Belt, including urban areas in the Punjab and Sind. In particular, the Pashtuns form a large portion of the lower stratum of the society in Sind Province's capital city Karachi, which has an estimated population of over 10 million. This social group could provide a major source of radical Islamic fundamentalists.

Further, not a few young people among the Punjabi ethnic group, which occupy over 53% of Pakistan's total population of 145 million, are said to be "Talibanized."¹¹

It cannot be denied that "Talibanization" could lead to many difficult problems for Pakistan. In particular, if the "Islamization" in the Pakistani military is transformed or advanced into "Talibanization," it is highly likely that Pakistan will face an extremely dangerous situation that threatens to undermine the state's very existence.

2.4 Pakistani Military, Afghanistan, Islamic Fundamentalism

The Zia regime, which came into being in the 1977 coup against the government of Z.A. Bhutto¹², began preparing the "Islamization" policy in response to Islamic parties' fierce opposition to the Bhutto government. It had taken place before Afghanistan's "Saur Revolution" of 1978. After the "Revolution", and particularly after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, Gen. Zia intensified his "Islamization" campaign, and that spread to the military, as described in the preceding section.

The Pakistani military has an intelligence unit, called the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). The ISI came to hold strong power in and out of the military through massive U.S. military and economic assistance (described later) provided to Pakistan during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan.

Pakistan's most important security issue is its relations with India. Pakistan's topography, which is long and narrow from north to south, has a security weakness of lacking "strategic depth." This partly prompted the ISI to try to take Afghanistan under its influence and this policy, after many twists and turns, led to Pakistan's full support for the Taliban.

Thus, the Taliban militia built itself into a powerful force rapidly with the help of U.S. funding and military training provided by the Pakistani military. On its debut in 1994, the Taliban militia reportedly had a strength of only about 2,000 soldiers but in less than two years expanded into a force of around 20,000 by the end of 1996. In 2000, the militia reportedly had as many as 50,000 men¹³. In analyzing the international situation after the terrorist attacks in the United States in September, 2001, it is more important to note the fact that the Taliban soldiers have come from a wide array of geographical regions and social strata rather than to note the remarkable growth of the Taliban militia.

In 1982, President Gen. Zia began considering creating a "new political system" to establish the military's right to intervene in politics on the

logic of "Islamic democracy." Before that, the ISI had already started providing military training to volunteers from Islamic states to foster them as "Islamic soldiers." These young soldiers were later sent into Afghanistan, and came to be known as "Arab Afghans." Actually, however, they were not just Arabs but Muslims from a total of 43 countries, including Central Asian states and the Philippines. The number of foreign nationals who received ideological and military training in Pakistan reached 100,000¹⁴ by 1992.

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Notes:

6. He is also referred to as Usama bin Laden.
7. The U.S. government had begun to distance itself from the Taliban regime before Osama's reentry into Afghanistan in the face of American women's mounting anger over the Taliban's disregard of Afghan women's human rights.
8. Osama bin Ladin's assets are reportedly worth an estimated \$300 million. (op. cit.) Ahmed Rashid, "Bin Ladin and the Taliban: Endless War", *Gendai*, November 2001 issue, p. 33.
9. The faction originated in Islamic fundamentalism on the Arabian Peninsula in the 18th century and seeks the "purification of Islam."
10. "Afghanistan's Fact Sheet," *Frontline*, October 26, 2001, p. 131. The substantial decline in the ratio of the Pashtuns (see Reference Material 5) to Afghanistan's total population came as the massive outflow of refugees to other countries and increased deaths in the civil war outnumbered the natural increase in population.
11. See relevant sections in Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban*, translated by Sadao Sakai and Rikijii Ito, Kodansha. (the original: Ahmed Rashid, *TALIBAN: Islam, Oil and the New Great Game in Central Asia*, I.B. Tauris Publishers, London, 2000).
12. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. After becoming prime minister in 1973, he adopted a state socialism policy, attempted at civilian control of the military, and pursued secularism. Condemned by various quarters in Pakistan, Bhutto was purged and executed in 1979 by the Zia military regime that had come to power in a coup in 1977.
13. Based on various newspaper and magazine reports.
14. (op. cit.) Ahmed Rashid, "Bin Ladin and the Taliban: Endless War," *Gendai*, November 2001 issue, p. 32.